



USDA Forest Service – Southern Region
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
GEORGIA



January 2004

Issue: Horse Use on the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests

Background:

Horseback riding is a popular pastime on the two national forests in Georgia. The new Land Management Plan calls for a significant change in the use of horses on the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests. Previously, horseback riding was essentially allowed anywhere on the national forests. This policy resulted in the creation of a system of unplanned horse trails stretching across the forest. Many of the unplanned trails were created in inappropriate locations. For example, some of the unplanned trails are located too close to sensitive streambanks. Before the Forest Service can build a new trail for any type of use and add it to the trail system as a designated trail, specialists must complete all the necessary environmental surveys to ensure that we are not locating a trail on top of a culturally sensitive site or near an endangered species or other inappropriate location.

The new Forest Land Management Plan allows horseback riding only on designated trails (about 200 miles on the Forest) or on designated roads (about 1,600 miles on the Forest). To ensure that there is an adequate distribution of trails on the Forest, the Forest Service is currently in the process of working through a trails analysis. This analysis will identify where all types of designated trails are currently located on the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forest. This analysis will help managers determine where there are opportunities for locating additional trails (based on current distribution, user need, and appropriate location) as well as finding opportunities for designating trails for more than one type of use. The Forest currently has some multiple use trails that combine uses such as hiking and mountain biking.

Forest Service managers will work closely with horseback riding groups and interested individuals to ensure that there are adequate opportunities on the National Forest to pursue their recreation opportunity while protecting the natural resources of the Forest for future generations to use and enjoy.

For additional information about this issue, contact: Larry Lockett (770) 297-3033 or Karen McKenzie at (770) 297-3061